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A BELIEF IN WITCHCRAFT

UNSUPPORTED BY SCRIPTURE.

AN
ESSAY,

BY
JAMES PATERSON, A.M.

MINISTER OF THE ASSOCIATED CONGREGATION,

MIDMAR.

“Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power
“ of God.” MATT.

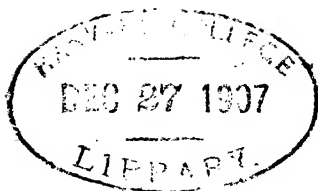
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PREFACE.

ONE necessitated, by official duties, frequently to converse with men in the ordinary ranks of life, and to gain an acquaintance with their sentiments, must observe how generally a belief in Witchcraft prevails among them, and the strong conviction they feel of its truth. This belief, according to the sense in which they understand the term Witchcraft, is alike repugnant to reason, and inconsistent with the superintendence of Providence; and mistakes, respecting certain passages of Scripture, must be assigned as the chief cause that, among the populace, it obtains so extensively. But for these mistakes, stories about Witchcraft would, long since, have been treated, by every reasonable person, with derision. At most, they would have only served, like the tales of fairies, for the amusement of the nursery, or the embellishment

A

lishment of fictions. But Christians, believing that Scripture teaches the existence of Witchcraft, from a dread of contradicting the doctrines of holy writ, dare not deny its reality. If it prevailed in former times, as they suppose Scripture declares, the same crime may still exist. Thus they are induced to admit one of the greatest absurdities imaginable into the system of their religious opinions, and to receive one of the worst "fables of old wives" as part of that revelation communicated by "the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, and who hath declared him."

But some may be disposed to argue, that Witchcraft is a subject unworthy of discussion; that, if a belief in it be an absurdity, it at least is harmless; if it be a prejudice, it can be so little mischievous, that an attempt to remove it will not be recompensed, for the labour it may cost, or the odium to which it may expose. But that mistakes with regard to what Scripture teaches are ever
harm-

harmless, cannot be granted, and a belief in Witchcraft is productive of many pernicious consequences. It introduces very erroneous, and unworthy notions of God, and of his government. When the youthful and inquisitive hear Christians speak of Witchcraft as if it were undoubtedly a doctrine of Revelation, struck with its absurdity, while they believe that Scripture countenances its existence, they become strongly prejudiced against the sacred volume, and conceive its doctrines to be nothing but a system of irrational tenets, and superstitious fooleries. Or if they be convinced, that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," and that its doctrines are important as they are true, a belief that the existence of Witchcraft is taught by these does them no small mischief. It appears to them so extremely absurd, that nothing short of a proof from Scripture could have convinced them of its reality. Of this proof they suppose themselves possessed, and they receive, as part of their religious

ligious creed, a doctrine against which their reason revolts. By this they are taught, that, in matters of religion, reason is no judge of evidence; and that, by it, they cannot distinguish what is true from what is false. This tends strongly to persuade them that, in some cases, the doctrines of Scripture may be contrary to the dictates of reason: and when once this is admitted, men may be driven to the extreme of fanaticism or wickedness. They are fully prepared for being duped by those who are sufficiently skilled to take advantage of their error, and who are worthless enough to attempt it; but they are ill qualified for being his disciples, who is "the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

The state of society is now such, that Christians may expect to be assailed by "perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth." These cavillers, however deficient, in other respects, of sagacity and talents, have generally wisdom enough

enough to attack most earnestly some absurdity which, from mistake, is considered as composing part of that religion taught in Scripture. They feel that their efforts are too feeble to shake the stability of the doctrines of Revelation; and that, with all their powers of perversion, they are not successful in turning these into ridicule: but when Christians own for divine truth, what hath no connexion with, or is even contrary to it, they furnish their enemies with an opportunity of obtaining a victory over them, by which they may be induced to abandon religion; or, if they continue steadfast in their adherence to it, subject themselves, and their principles, to the petulance and laughter of "unreasonable and wicked men." Witchcraft is one of the standing jests of the minor adversaries of Christianity. They produce its absurdity as a proof that Scripture is not entitled to credit, and as an evidence that those who believe it are the dupes of superstition and folly. Tried by such cavillers,

the ingenuous youth, who suspects that the notion of Witchcraft is irrational, but who still believes it countenanced by Scripture, is in great danger of being overcome by ridicule, or seduced by deceitful reasonings. Feeling himself incapable of repelling the attacks of his adversaries, and, from his ignorance, believing them directed against the doctrines of religion, he abandons it as indefensible, and is driven to scepticism, or infidelity; to profligacy, and ruin. It, therefore, is to be hoped, that he is undeserving of reprehension, who attempts to free Scripture from an absurdity which, owing to a prevailing misapprehension, is usually attached to it;—who seeks to wrest from those who lie in wait to “beguile unstable souls,” an instrument of mischief; and to shew Christians that the attacks of their enemies are successful only against tenets forming no part of “the faith of the gospel.”

A BELIEF IN WITCHCRAFT

UNSUPPORTED BY SCRIPTURE.

SECTION I.

A BELIEF IN WITCHCRAFT VERY
PREVALENT.

Sed in longum tamen ævum
Manserunt, hodieque manent vestigia ruris.—HOR.

THE following definition of Witchcraft seems to accord perfectly with the meaning usually attached to the term.—“Witchcraft is a supernatural power which persons obtain the possession of, by entering into a compact with the devil.”¹ An attempt to prove that this crime was never

¹ Enc. Brit. voc. Witchcraft.

never perpetrated may appear very ridiculous, but till lately "Witchcraft was universally believed in Europe."² It would seem not to have been wholly discredited by one of no less note than Dr. Robertson, the celebrated historian. After stating the multiplied enormities, occasioned by the feeble administration of James allowing them to pass with impunity, he adds, "But though James connived at real crimes, Witchcraft, which is commonly an imaginary one, engrossed his attention, and those suspected of it felt the whole weight of his authority."³ That a man of Dr. Robertson's information and abilities could have believed Witchcraft possible is not to be credited. One would be tempted to

² Enc. Brit. voc. Witchcraft. ³ Hist. of Scot. Book viii.

to suspect that the sentence quoted dropt from his pen, while he thought little about the matter; but, knowing that Witchcraft was frequently mentioned in Scripture, and, not having studied the meaning of the sacred writers when treating of it, he might deem it indecent, in a clergyman, to deny its existence; and liable to be construed into an evidence that he disbelieved the doctrines of Revelation. Whatever manner be taken to account for the sentiment he expresses, it serves to shew how generally the stories of Witchcraft were credited.

Having, at different times, had occasion to repeat Dr. Smith's remark, that "The popular fear of engrossing and forestalling may be compared to the popular terrors and
"sus-

"suspicions of Witchcraft,"⁴ the reply uniformly was, "Men might, if they pleased, scoff at the notion of it, but the existence of Witchcraft, from what Scripture said of it, behoved to be admitted." Nor is it possible to converse, concerning Witchcraft, with those in the lower walks of life, or, even, with the majority of those who have received a better education, and whose opinions are more consonant with reason, without observing the rooted conviction of its existence which obtains in their minds.

An attempt, however, to disprove its existence would be wholly unworthy of the labour; but it must be of considerable consequence to shew that Scripture affords not the shadow
of

⁴ Wealth of Nations, Book iv. Chap. 5.

of a reason for believing that such a crime was ever perpetrated: for a fear of contradicting its authority makes many Christians admit what they would, otherwise, perceive unreasonable, and treat, with justice, as a fable imposed upon ignorant credulity. And a misapprehension of the meaning of Scripture, respecting Witchcraft, furnishes cavillers against the truth of its doctrines with a vulgar subject of raillery.

The design of the following pages, then, is to prove that Scripture affords not the slightest reason to conclude that the crime of Witchcraft, as the word is usually understood, and according to the definition of it already given, ever existed.

If the existence of Witchcraft be disproved, it will only be in suberviency

viency to the chief object in view, and with the design of evincing that the belief of such a crime could derive no support from it, unless by a misapprehension of the meaning of Scripture.

SECT.

SECT. II.

A BELIEF IN WITCHCRAFT PREVAILED AMONG THE HEATHEN.

A BELIEF in Witchcraft is not confined to those who possess Revelation; it prevailed very generally among the Heathen. This is sufficiently evident from the frequent mention of it in the classics. Not to specify others, a Greek poet, and a Roman, have given a minute detail of the purposes of those who practised Witchcraft, and of the manner of their operation.⁵ Their description bears an exact resemblance to one given by an ingenious countryman of our own.⁶ Folly varies in
B its

⁵ Theoc. Idy ii. Hor. Sat. Lib. i. Sat. 8.

⁶ Burns' Tam O'Shanter.

its modes, somewhat, according to the fashion of the age, or country in which it prevails ; but it substantially is the same. In the pictures drawn by them, the features differ a little, but their likeness marks their kindredship. They belong evidently to children of the same family. There is a vivacity, indeed, in the colouring, and imagery, of our celebrated, but unfortunate countryman, of which neither the Greek nor the Roman can boast.

These descriptions afford abundant evidence, that stories of Witchcraft were current among the populace, and credited : and they evince, with equal clearness, that the popular belief, respecting them, was a groundless fancy.

That Witchcraft, according to the
sense

sense in which it is generally understood, could not exist among the Heathen is undeniable; for they knew of no such being as Satan, and could not be in compact with him. Those reported to practise this art had, indeed; their deities, to whose service they peculiarly devoted themselves. They invoked the aid of Hecate, or Tisiphone. But it will not surely be urged, that, by the assistance of imaginary deities, they could perform what exceeded human power. "We know than an idol is nothing in the world."⁷ The gods whom the nations feared were alike incapable of doing good, and of doing evil. "Their idols were silver and gold, the work of men's hands; they that make them are like unto them; so is everyone that trusteth in them."⁸

B 2

The

7 Cor. viii. 4.

8 Psal. cxv. 4. 8.

The Heathen could not obtain that supernatural power, supposed to be possessed by those who exercise Witchcraft, from any compact with Satan, for they did not even know of his existence ; nor could they derive it from any of their gods, for all these, whether represented as possessing benevolent or malignant qualities, were mere vanities : the feverish dreams of those who had “ become vain in their imaginations, and whose foolish heart was darkened.” A god formed of a molten or graven image was profitable for nothing. The stock of a tree, or a statue of brass, could not enable those who worshipped them, as deities, to perform miracles. All pretences to supernatural power among the Heathen may be pronounced, without hesitation, falsehood and imposture. They were

were utterly incapable of committing that crime commonly understood by the term Witchcraft.

The characters and attainments of those who have ever been most liable to be suspected of Witchcraft decisively prove it an imaginary crime. Men of extensive information, and unwearied research, are not likely to be accused of it; suspicion falls, almost uniformly, upon the most ignorant and helpless of our species. The very belief of it is most prevalent in dark and barbarous times. In an enlightened and philosophical age and country, it obtains credit chiefly with the populace; and, even for this, it, perhaps, is more indebted to misapprehensions of what Scripture says respecting it, than to any other cause.

SECT. III.

SOME OF THE CHIEF PRECEPTS IN SCRIPTURE RESPECTING WITCHCRAFT EXAMINED.

It may be averred, with perfect certainty, that as no human creature ever possessed the power of doing good, or of doing evil, by such a compact with Satan as is usually meant by the term Witchcraft, so there is nothing in Scripture to favour, in the slightest degree, the belief that it ever was formed; or that, in consequence of it, crimes were perpetrated.

To support this position, it will be necessary to examine some of the passages of Scripture, in which the subject is most plainly introduced; and owing to misapprehensions of which,

which, chiefly, mistakes concerning it have been occasioned.

Of such passages the following are some of the principal :—

Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live. A man also, or woman, that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. ⁹

That the terms employed by our translators, in these passages, are the fittest which our language could afford, to express the import of the ori-

⁹ Ex. xxii. 18. Lev. xx. 27. Deut. xviii. 10. 11.

original, is more than questionable. Of this one may be satisfied, by comparing our version of the Scriptures, with the ancient Greek translation, called the Septuagint. In reading the former, the silly stories of Witchcraft, propagated and believed in modern Europe, present themselves to the imagination; from a perusal of the latter, nothing occurs to the mind but the superstitions of the Heathen, to which we have been familiarized, by an acquaintance with their own writers, and have concluded them to be mere vanities. The Jews were prone to idolatry, and greatly inclined to imitate the worst abominations of the Gentiles. To these their law refers in the passages quoted.

One phrase, used by our translators, merits particular attention, because

cause a misconception of it is very common. The English reader is at a loss to conceive what is to be understood by having a **FAMILIAR SPIRIT**. If any thing be suggested to him by this phrase, it, most commonly, is, that one enjoyed such intimacy with some impure spirit, that, at pleasure, he could command his aid, and, by it, perform works above human power. But the original Scriptures have not the smallest tendency to create such a notion. The meaning assigned to the original term, by one, well skilled in the Hebrew tongue, is, "A Pytho, " a diviner or conjurer, who pretended to give prophetic answers, " and could make their bellies swell " like a bottle or bag, to a surprising " size, and then could speak so that " a low shrill voice seemed to come " from the lower parts of the swollen " body,

" body, where the familiar spirit was
 " supposed to be, and to speak."¹⁰
 And the Seventy translate the term
 in the original, by a word which sig-
 nifies a VENTRILOQUIST."

Ventriloquism is an art by which
 some persons can so modify their
 voice, as to make it seem to the hearer
 to proceed from a distance, and in
 any direction they please. Such an
 art, although by no means common,
 some do acquire. To enter into any
 disquisition about the means by which
 such a deception is practised, is fo-
 reign to the purpose of this Essay :¹²
 and it may appear superfluous to in-
 form the most credulous, that Satanic
 influence is not requisite for its at-
 tainment. This art, or something
 ana-

¹⁰ Robertson's Clavis Pent. No. 3028.

¹¹ *Ἐγγασπίμυθος*. ¹² See an amusing account
 of a Ventriloquist, Enc. Brit. voc. Physiology.

analogous to it, some of the Heathen did acquire, and, by means of it, imposed upon the credulity of mankind. By the Heathen it was believed that there were DEMONS. These demons were supposed to be middle beings between God and mortal man.¹³ Those then who practised divination among them, and who had acquired the power of modulating their voice so as to deceive the hearers, about the direction in which it came, and from what it proceeded, pretended that what they said was a response given by a demon, whose votaries they were. Some worthless Jews learned this art, and practised it under the same pretences.

If this be a true account of the matter, all that is to be understood
by

¹³ Parkh. Greek Lex. voc. Δαίμονιον.

by having a *familiar spirit* is, that some, who acquired the art of deceiving a hearer respecting the direction in which a voice came, and from what it proceeded, practising this deception, pretended to have the power of revealing secrets, and alleged that the replies they made, were responses given by a spirit, with whom they were familiar. It was such a juggling trick as might deceive an ignorant and credulous people, but it required no supernatural power: nor was it the effect of Satanic influence, in the sense in which, when, treating of this subject, that phrase is used.

But admitting that the representation, given by our translators, is a fair transcript of the original; that the picture is exhibited by them, without being changed in the slightest
shade

shade of its colouring, the position, that there is nothing in Scripture to favour, in the smallest degree, the belief that any man is capable of performing works above human power, by means of a compact with Satan, will remain unshaken.

That rites were practised, and pretences to supernatural power made, is allowed by all. The designation by which such conduct and pretences were distinguished, would be the same, whether they were or were not impostures. At present, an historian, or legislator, having occasion to mention Witchcraft, behoved to call it by the same name, whether he considered it as a cheat, or as a crime, of which the existence was indubitable. By Moses, Witchcraft is mentioned, and prohibited under the severest penalties; but he enters into no discus-

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sion

sion about its nature, whether it was an imposition practised upon the credulity of mankind, or whether, by means of it, these things were effected to which it pretended. It cannot be determined, from what he says concerning it, whether he deemed its pretences justified by facts, or considered them as mere fallacies, by which men were deceived. According to either supposition, it was equally mischievous, and necessarily prohibited, under penalties of like severity. Whether a pretence, or a reality, Witchcraft had the same tendency to turn men from the living God, to the service of idols: and it was proper, that those by whom it was practised should be subjected to the punishment of death.

Upon the supposition that Witchcraft was a mere pretence, indebted
for

for belief to the cunning of impostors, and the credulity of men, the law condemning to death those who practised its rites, and laid claim to the powers these were supposed to convey, cannot be accused of undue severity. In the state of society which obtains among us, Witchcraft, whatever be its nature, can do no great harm. A fortune-teller may gull the simple out of a few pence, or they who pretend to inform by whom goods have been stolen, may create very unwarrantable suspicions, and bitter enmities among neighbours. But so low is Witchcraft fallen in the confidence of men, and its responses are communicated with such caution and obscurity, that, by it, the latter of these effects is seldom produced. Derision is now a fitter punishment for it than death. But the state of the

ancient Jews was very different. They were a rude and perverse people, credulous of every absurdity, averse to obey the law of the Lord, and, above all other sins, they were addicted to idolatry. And, admitting that Witchcraft was a mere pretence, an imposture practised by little juggling tricks, supported by impudence, and credited by ignorance; the infallible consequence of its prevalence would have been to have effaced from the minds of the Israelites, all knowledge and regard of the true religion; and to have converted them to the worst abominations of the Heathen: the precept, therefore, in their law, Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live, was worthy of the wisdom and rectitude of the Supreme Judge.

It is manifest, then, that from Witchcraft being a capital offence,
we

we cannot infer that it was aught but an imposture. The law specifies a crime, which might prevail, but enters into no discussion, whether it was practised by compact with Satan, or whether it was a false pretence, indebted for attention and belief to impudence, trick, and credulity.

If the authority of sacred writ were necessary to prove that Witchcraft was all a lie, that those who practised it were, in consequence of Satanic influence, possessed of no additional power, and could perform no works exceeding human ability, its testimony is not wanting. By the prophet, Witchcraft is referred wholly to trick. They "that have familiar spirits, and wizards, peep and mutter."¹⁴ The voice "of one that hath a familiar spirit" is represented

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as

¹⁴ Is. viii. 19.

as coming "out of the ground, and
 "his speech as whispering out of the
 "dust."¹⁵ By the modulation of
 their voice, they imposed upon their
 hearers, and gave out that the words
 emitted by themselves, were res-
 ponses given by a spirit.

What the law enjoins concerning
 it then affords no reason to believe,
 that such a compact with Satan, as,
 usually, is understood by the term
 Witchcraft, was ever entered into by
 any one, or that, in consequence of
 it, any works were ever performed.

A view of these passages in sacred
 history, supposed to favour the no-
 tion of Witchcraft, will lead to the
 same conclusion.

¹⁵ Is. xxix. 4.

SECT IV.

THE PRETENCES OF THE EGYPTIAN MAGICIANS EXAMINED.

THE persuasion is pretty general, that, by the magicians of Egypt, true miracles were performed: and their history has been deemed a decisive proof of supernatural powers being possessed in consequence of Satanic aid. Upon the passage where it is said the magicians of Egypt changed their rods into serpents, the remark made by Poole is, "In show and appearance, which was not difficult for the devil to do, whether by altering the air and the spectators' sight, and by causing their rods both to look and to move like serpents; or by a sudden and secret
" con-

“conveyance of real serpents thither, “and removing the rods.””¹⁶ And he accounts for all the other wonders wrought by them in a similar manner. From a strict examination, however, of these miracles, said to have been performed by the Egyptian magicians, one will perceive that there is reason for concluding, that nothing was done by them, above what might have been accomplished by any band of jugglers, placed in their circumstances.

In confirmation of this, it may be remarked, that Moses merely informs us, that the magicians counterfeited his miracles, in such a manner, that they hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and made him refuse to let the Israelites go. Speaking of his miracles, which they counterfeited, he says, “The
“magi-

¹⁶ Poole’s Annot. Exod. vii. 11.

“ magicians of Egypt did so with
 “ their enchantments.” They likely
 muttered unintelligible sounds, and
 performed magical rites; then exhib-
 ited appearances, which were be-
 lieved to be equivalent to the mira-
 cles Moses had wrought. This he
 testifies, and this is the whole of his
 testimony. All that he says was
 equally true, whether, by their en-
 chantments, the magicians wrought
 miracles, or, by their enchantments
 and frauds, imposed upon the Egyp-
 tian court, and people. From the
 testimony of Moses, then, no proof
 can be drawn that the magicians per-
 formed miracles, and did not deceive
 by impostures; for this is a subject
 about which he is entirely silent.

The magicians, if they could not
 perform miracles, were under strong
 temptations to attempt deception.

Their

Their reputation was implicated. By the wise men of Egypt, it must have been considered a reproach to be excelled by a Hebrew. They wished to please Pharaoh, and to retain the Israelites in subjection. On these accounts, if they could not imitate the miracles of Moses, they were under a strong temptation to practise frauds. If they wished to practise these, their circumstances, for attempting it with success, were the most favourable. They were aided by the whole authority of government, and all in reputation for wisdom among the Egyptians were of their party. No opportunity of detecting their impositions would have been allowed to Moses.

These considerations render the wonders said to have been wrought by the magicians very suspicious.
Their

Their characters were such, that they cannot be supposed scrupulous about the means they employed, if, by these, in opposing an adversary, they expected success. If incapable of performing genuine miracles, they were under strong inducements to counterfeit them by fraud. If they attempted it, their circumstances were calculated much to favour imposition. The presumption against the genuineness of their miracles then must be strong.

It remains to be enquired, whether there be any thing in their history to confirm this unfavourable presumption. And it is observable, that they succeeded in counterfeiting some of the miracles of Moses, but that in attempting to imitate others they failed. If, by Satanic influence, they wrought genuine miracles, their failure

ture seems unaccountable. One miracle might have been counterfeited, upon this supposition, as easily as another. But if they deceived by fraud, the history will enable us to account for their success in some, and their failure in other instances. For, let it be remarked, that, before they attempted to imitate them, they knew what these miracles were that they succeeded in counterfeiting, and they had time to prepare their impositions: but concerning those in the imitation of which they failed, they had received no previous notice, and they were, accordingly, unable successfully to practise a fraud.

It was the first three miracles wrought by Moses that the magicians succeeded in counterfeiting. The first one was his rod turned into a serpent. In consequence of this

“ Pharaoh

“ Pharaoh also called the wise men
 “ and the sorcerers : now the magi-
 “ cians of Egypt, they, also did in
 “ like manner, with their enchant-
 “ ments. For they cast down every
 “ man his rod, and they became ser-
 “ pents.”¹⁷ But when the magicians
 were sent for, they would be inform-
 ed what the miracle was they were
 called to imitate, and if they meant
 to counterfeit it by fraud, they had
 time to prepare for the cheat.¹⁸

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¹⁷ Ex. vii. 11, 12.

¹⁸ The authority of a very respectable He-
 brew scholar may be adduced to corroborate
 the evidence, that the imitation of Moses' mira-
 cles was effected by juggling tricks. And his
 testimony will be received with the greater
 confidence, that, in giving it, he was pursuing
 no argument, and supporting no theory. Ro-
 bertson, in his key to the Pentateuch, after
 specifying the import of that term, in the pas-

The next miracle they counterfeited was turning the waters into blood. But, as Pharoah was threatened with this plague, some time probably elapsed between the threatening and the infliction of it, and they would, accordingly, have information early enough to afford them time to prepare their deceptions.

The third miracle they counterfeited was bringing up frogs upon Egypt. To it the same remark is applicable. With it Pharoah was threatened.

The first plague they attempted,
in

sage respecting the Egyptian magicians, rendered ENCHANTMENTS, adds, "In fact, it seems
"to signify jerks of the fingers, and rapid gest-
"ticulations, like the flash of a brandished
"sword." "Others," says he, "render it se-
"cret murmurs; charms recited in a low tone
"of voice." Rob. Cla. Pent. No. 2200.

in vain, to imitate, was to turn “the
 “dust of the earth into lice in man
 “and in beast.” And without any
 previous notice this plague was in-
 flicted.

We have no account whether they
 attempted, or not, to imitate the two
 next plagues inflicted upon the
 Egyptians.

The plague, by which these were
 succeeded, was “a boil breaking
 “forth with blains, upon man, and
 “upon beast, throughout all the land
 “of Egypt.” This plague also was
 inflicted without any previous threat-
 ening, and the magicians, far from
 being prepared to counterfeit it,
 “could not stand before Moses be-
 “cause of the boil ; for the boil was
 “upon the magicians, and upon all
 “the Egyptians.” They appear,
 after this, to have made no more at-
 D 2 tempts.

tempts to imitate these plagues, by which their country was desolated.

The presumption, then, that the Egyptian magicians performed nothing above human power, but merely imposed a cheat upon Pharaoh, and the people, is greatly strengthened by the fact, that they succeeded only in imitating those miracles of Moses, of which they had received such timely information as afforded them an opportunity to prepare impositions; and that when, without this previous notice, they tried to counterfeit others, they failed in the attempt.

It remains to be investigated, lastly, whether the imitations they produced of Moses' miracles were such as fraud might easily effect. The first of these imitations was the conversion of their rods into serpents.
And

And it is to be observed, that serpents were objects of very ancient and general worship among the Heathen.¹⁹ Stories of serpents were interwoven with their mythologies. These animals were much regarded by them in divination, and they were emblematical of their divining god. These facts render it extremely probable, that the magicians and Egyptian priests would be provided with serpents, for the purposes of superstition, for deceiving the people, and for obtaining their respect for their idolatrous religion. If they were provided with serpents, and accustomed to employ them in deceiving

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¹⁹ " But as Divine Wisdom procures many
 " ends by one and the same means; so we may
 " see here, that besides this use (in throwing
 " the reader's attention wholly on the serpent,)
 " it had another, viz. to make the serpent,

the people, nothing was easier, in their circumstances, while Moses would not have been allowed to detect the imposture, than for them, by mere slight of hand, to substitute, in the presence of Pharoah and his Court, a serpent in the place of a rod. No vagabond juggler could fail in practising such a deception : and, although it may be inconsistent with sound reasoning to allow, that by Satanic aid they performed any thing miraculous, they may be considered as adepts in the arts of imposition.

Their changing of water into blood, and their bringing up frogs, can easily be accounted for upon the same hypothesis. The

“ which was of the MOST SACRED AND VENER-
 “ ABLE REGARD in the mysterious religion of
 “ Egypt, the object of the Israelites’ utter ab-
 “ horrence and detestation.” Warburton’s
 Div. Leg. of Moses, Book vi. Sect. 2. Note.

The account, given by Moses, of these magicians, is in no ways inconsistent with the supposition, that the miracles they were believed to have wrought, were the mere effect of trick. The whole of the circumstances mentioned by him seem clearly to refer them to this origin: and, by consequence, the feats of these sorcerers afford no proof that they wrought wonders by any compact with Satan.

SECT.

SECT. V.

THE POWERS OF BALAAM EXAMINED.



THE opinion formed of Balaam, in his own age, was, “ that these whom “ he blessed were blessed, and these “ whom he cursed were cursed.”²⁰ And from his history, many conclude that he was possessed of supernatural power. The account given of him is then worthy of attention. He was a very extraordinary character. Although one of the most infamous of men, he was a true prophet. He was an enemy to Israel, but he foretold with truth what “ this people “ would do in the latter days.” But he possessed not this knowledge from
Satanic

²⁰ Num. xxii. 6.

Satanic influence, "the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth."²¹ That "the spirit of prophecy" should be communicated to Balaam is no more extraordinary than that Judas "was numbered with the Apostles, and obtained part of the same ministry."²²

Whether Balaam ever uttered any prophecies, under the direction of the Spirit of truth, besides those recorded in scripture, it must be vain to conjecture; but he was famed for his skill in divination. This skill does not prove him to have been possessed of supernatural knowledge. His moral qualities were such, that, if he could have amassed riches, or acquired honour, by deceiving men, a regard for integrity would not have restrained him from making the attempt.

²¹ Num. xxiii. 5.

²² Acts, i. 17.

tempt. And successfully to impose upon the credulous, by pretending to foretell events, required a much smaller portion of sagacity and cunning than he possessed. A judgment shrewdly formed of what might be expected, according to the ordinary course of things, and an answer couched in obscure and ambiguous terms, which would accord with the event, whatever it might be, would gain the belief of the ignorant; and, without admitting that he possessed supernatural knowledge, except when he spake by "the inspiration of the Almighty," the cunning and sagacity of Balaam, combined with the credulity and ignorance of his age, will sufficiently account for his fame. Deceivers flourish most in a barbarous state of society. They are incapable of de-
ceiving

ceiving in an enlightened age ; and Balaam lived when society was in a rude state.

After attempting in vain to curse Israel, Balaam said “ Surely there “ is no enchantment against Jacob, “ neither is there any divination “ against Israel.”²³ And, after having been repeatedly disappointed in his attempt to curse this favoured people, it is said of him, that “ he “ went not, as at other times, to seek “ for enchantments.”²⁴ From this some may be disposed to argue, that, by means of his enchantments, Balaam had been accustomed to succeed in cursing those to whom he wished ill ; and that his present failure was not owing to his being unaided by Satanic influence, but because, making an attempt upon his chosen people;

²³ Num. xxiii. 23.

²⁴ Num. xxiv. 1.

people, God frustrated his designs. It will, therefore, be necessary to examine what may be the precise meaning of these passages of Scripture.

And it is remarkable that the words in Hebrew translated ENCHANTMENT and ENCHANTMENTS, spring from the same root as the word in Hebrew signifying a *Serpent*; and that in the Greek translation, they are rendered by terms coming from a word signifying a *bird*. To account for this, it may be observed, that the Heathens were used to judge of their success in any enterprize, by noticing what they called OMENS.

These omens were tokens of good or of ill. They were signs, supposed to be exhibited by present appearances, from which men might judge whether their wishes would be fulfilled

filled or frustrated. As their omens were favourable, or unfavourable, they expected success, or dreaded disappointment.²⁵ Almost every thing might furnish an omen to their superstitious minds; but serpents, birds, and the entrails of victims they sacrificed, were some of the principal things to which they looked, when anxious to notice appearances indicating whether they were, or were not to be successful. By the contor-

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25 The Heathen were accustomed to observe omens, and to be guided by them, not in important matters merely ; but, also, in the ordinary occurrences of life. Of this Xenophon will be admitted an unexceptionable witness : and, according to him, “ the generality assert, “ that by birds, or by meeting others, they are “ induced to desist from, or to prosecute, an “ object.” Xen. Mem. Book i. Chap. i. Sect. 4. Much folly of the same kind exists among the

tions of serpents, by the flight of birds, as they directed their course to the rising or setting sun, or by their feeding, as they ate with avidity or shyly, they judged if an undertaking, in which they were engaged, was likely to be prosperous or otherwise.

The history of the Heathen abundantly testifies how greatly their minds were affected with this superstition and nonsense. When they entered upon any undertaking of moment, omens were carefully consulted, and it frequently was persevered

vulgar even in Christian countries. Who knows not, when setting off about an affair of importance, if they meet one having an *unlucky foot*, or if a magpie happen to hop across their path, that they shall not succeed in the business? The croaking of a raven hath been deemed a frightful omen in ancient times and in modern.

vered in, or relinquished, as they were judged favourable or unfavourable. The king of Babylon is represented by the prophet as "standing at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination: he made his arrows bright, he consulted with images, he looked in the liver."²⁶

If it should be admitted then that the term OMEN and OMENS are more proper versions of the original terms than ENCHANTMENT and ENCHANTMENTS, it will follow, that the meaning of the passages in which these terms occur, is, that Balaam examined certain objects, that, from the appearances they exhibited, he might judge what would be the destiny of Israel. Whether his omens were derived from the contortions and coiling

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²⁶ Ezekiel, xxi. 21.

ing of serpents, or the flight and feeding of birds, or from something different from either, it is in vain to conjecture.

The import of these passages, when explained according to this theory, will be, that Balaam could find no appearance indicating that Jacob should be overthrown or subdued. There was no omen unfavourable to Israel. Surely there is no omen against Jacob; nothing that prognosticates infelicity to him; neither is there any divination against Israel; whoever prophecies of them must predict good.

In this matter, that alone which ought to occasion surprize is, that Balaam should have confessed the truth. That, to please the king of Moab, he did not predict evil of Jacob, although he beheld no token indicating

dicating that he should be unhappy. He "loved the wages of unrighteousness,"²⁷ and he knew that to foretell evil of Israel was the sure way to obtain, from the king of Moab, riches and honour; but "destruction from God was a terror to him." Covetous as he was, for "his house full of silver and gold, he could not go beyond the word of the Lord his God to do less or more."²⁸ He was under the controul of the Almighty, and, contrary to his inclination, he was compelled to prophesy good of that people he wished to curse.

But it may be asked, what made Balaam seek for omens? What faith could he have in them, or what indications could they afford him of future events? This conduct may be

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²⁷ 2 Pet. ii. 15.²⁸ Num. xxii. 18.

accounted for in different ways. He might be convinced that omens were mere vanities, but he might judge them well fitted for imposing upon the king of Moab. By looking after such signs, he might expect to exalt himself in the esteem of those by whom he had been called, as a man possessing unequalled knowledge, and unrivalled power. Or Balaam's own mind might be imbued with superstition. Accustomed to omens, he might believe that they were true indications of future events: and, however groundless the notion, he might consult them in the full persuasion that from them he could discern what was afterwards to happen. His conduct in observing them, may evince him an impostor, or shew that he was under the dominion of superstition, but it affords no reason for suspecting that,

that, in virtue of a compact with Satan, he possessed supernatural intelligence or power.

And even upon the supposition that ENCHANTMENT and ENCHANTMENTS correspond better than any other terms with the original words, the argument that Balaam knew nothing of a compact with Satan, and possessed, in consequence of such an agreement, no power, will be equally conclusive.

The enchantments of the Heathen were words, commonly without meaning, they muttered over, and ceremonies, equally inefficient, they practised. That Balaam might observe such enchantments, for the purpose of deception, or because he was the dupe of superstition, will not be questioned: but this bears no resemblance to what is now understood by Witch-

Witchcraft. In this there appears no compact with Satan, nor any power derived from him. All that is discoverable from Balaam's story is, that, by artifice, he attempted to deceive the credulous; or, being himself addicted to superstition, that he acted consistently with such folly.²⁹

²⁹ Some may suppose that Balaam refers to something singularly mysterious, when he declares, "Balaam, the son of Beor, hath said, "and the man whose eyes are open hath said; "he hath said, which heard the words of God, "which saw the vision of the Almighty falling "into a trance, but having his eyes open." Num. xxiv. 3, 4. and 15, 16. But this declaration "plainly alludes to Balaam's not "seeing the angel of the Lord, at the same "time that the ass saw him. 'He hath said, "which heard the words of God, which saw "the vision of the Almighty;' for in this story "we read several times, that 'God came unto "Balaam, and said unto him,' and possibly he "might refer to former revelations. 'Falling

" into a trance, but having his eyes open ;' in
 " the original there is no mention of a *trance*;
 " the passage should have been rendered,
 " *falling, and his eyes were opened*, alluding to
 " what happened in the way, to Balaam's fal-
 " ling with his falling ass, and then having his
 " eyes opened. ' And when the ass saw the
 " angel of the Lord, she fell down under Ba-
 " laam.—Then the Lord opened the eyes of
 " Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord
 " standing in the way, and his sword drawn in
 " his hand; and he bowed down his head, and
 " fell flat on his face.' " Newton on the Pro-
 pheties, Diss. V.

SECT.

SECT VI.

THE FEAT OF THE WOMAN AT ENDOR EXAMINED.

Si quid novisti rectius istis,
Candidus imperti; si non, his utere mecum.——Her.

THE story of the woman at Endor, who had a FAMILIAR SPIRIT,³⁰ is by some considered as an incontrovertible proof, that, by means of a combination with fallen spirits, some were able to perform miracles, and reveal the secrets of futurity. But it will appear, upon enquiry, that whatever may be the difficulty of giving a satisfactory account of this remarkable history, it can afford no proof that
this

³⁰ 1 Sam. xxviii.

this woman was in compact with Satan, in the sense implied by the term Witchcraft; or that she had even formed a conception of such a league.

One of the pretences of those who had familiar spirits, was, that they could make the dead answer their enquiries. They deceived the hearers by the modulation of their voices. In some instances, they maintained, that these words, which, though spoken by themselves, seemed to issue from other objects, were the responses of a demon, or spirit: in other instances, as fitted the purposes of deception, they asserted that they were spoken by those whom they had raised from the dead. From the simplicity of those who consulted them, they were credited in the one case, and in the other. But that any should have the power of raising the dead,

dead, or of receiving answers from them, is a supposition connected with so many palpable absurdities, that, for a moment, it cannot be admitted. That the dead have any interest or knowledge respecting these things, about which they are supposed to be questioned, is very doubtful. But can aught, except the most infantile credulity, persuade, that the spells of an enchantress could bring the saints from blessedness, to reveal secrets; or relieve the wicked from their punishment.

Some attempt to avoid the absurdity of such a supposition, by allowing that the dead were not raised, but personated by Satan, and that he, by his sagacity, gave answers, which commonly accorded with the facts. It is vain to dispute whether such communication with Satan, as
 what

what is here supposed, be possible ; but there is not the slightest appearance of evidence that it, in fact, ever took place. All pretences to it can easily be accounted for, upon the supposition of imposture. Those who were believed to hold it, the ages in which it is said to have prevailed, the total ignorance of all men of science about the means of obtaining it, and the general derision pretences to it have received from men of intelligence and literature, are proofs far more than sufficient to evince the opinion of its existence a vulgar error.

These general remarks lead to the conclusion, that this woman, at Endor, who had a familiar spirit, while she pretended to raise the dead, and to receive responses from them, merely deceived, by " lying won-

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" ders,"

“ders,” them who consulted her. Over the dead she had no power. She could not make Satan reply to her enquiries. She deceived by her tricks. By the Seventy she is called a VENTRILOQUIST. She was one of these worthless and wretched impostors, to whom the prophet alludes, when he says, “thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.”³¹

Habituated to fraud, there is every reason to believe she meant, according to her custom of practising deception, to impose upon Saul. She said, “Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel.” When she professed to comply

³¹ Is. xxix. 4.

comply with Saul's request, it is natural to believe that she meant to practise upon him the same trick, by which she deceived others, by whom she was consulted; but it must be confessed, that the sequel of the story agrees not with the supposition that she deluded the king by imposture. Had this been the case, her responses would have been favourable. She would have been a prophetess of "smooth things." She would have promised success to his arms, and the destruction of the Philistines. It would seem, therefore, that the most satisfactory way of accounting for what is narrated by the historian, would be, to allow that some extraordinary appearance was exhibited; and that, in a miraculous manner, the king was informed of the ruin that awaited him, and

his army. This is the more probable, from the fact, that, in those ages, angels sometimes assumed visibility, that they might execute the orders with which they had been entrusted. Although the woman meant only to impose upon Saul, there is no absurdity in allowing that an extraordinary appearance might be exhibited, which she did not expect, and neither was able, nor attempted to produce ; and that, in a miraculous manner, his fate was revealed.

An incident, in some respects remarkably similar to this, befel one of the kings of Babylon. “ Belshazzar the king made a great feast
 “ to a thousand of his lords, and
 “ drank wine before the thousand.
 “ Belshazzar, whiles he tasted the
 “ wine, commanded to bring the
 “ golden and silver vessels, which
 “ his

" his father Nebuchadnezzar had
 " taken out of the temple which was
 " in Jerusalem, that the king and
 " his princes, his wives, and his con-
 " cubines, might drink therein. Then
 " they brought the golden vessels
 " that were taken out of the temple
 " of the house of God, which was at
 " Jerusalem, and the king, and his
 " princes, his wives, and his concu-
 " bines, drank in them. They drank
 " wine, and praised the gods of gold,
 " and of silver, of brass, of iron, of
 " wood, and of stone. In the same
 " hour, came forth the fingers of a
 " man's hand, and wrote over against
 " the candlestick, upon the plaster
 " of the wall of the king's palace;
 " and the king saw the part of the
 " hand that wrote."³² If God, in a
 miraculous manner, forewarned the

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king

Dan. v. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

king of Babylon of his doom, why might he not, in the same way, reveal to the Monarch of Israel his approaching ruin ?

It being allowed that Saul received the information he desired, by means of a miracle, affords, however, no reason to conclude that this miracle was produced by the arts of the woman who had a familiar spirit. The only thing calculated to create such a belief is, that the miracle was wrought at the time when the woman pretended, by her familiar spirit, "to bring up to Saul, him whom he should name to her." But the hand that wrote appeared at the time when "the king of Babylon, his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank from the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God, which
" was

“ was at Jerusalem.” And there is no more reason to think, that the arts of this woman had an efficacy to obtain a vision for Saul, or to get him the information he desired, than the drunken frolics of Belshazzar had to produce the “ fingers of a man’s hand, that wrote over against the candlestick, upon the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace.” In both instances, by a miracle, for the working of which no reason but the pleasure of the Almighty can be assigned, these men were informed that they were devoted to ruin.

**According to this way of accounting for the facts narrated by the historian, the matter stands thus : Saul was alarmed by the army of the Philistines. He was unable, by any means allowed by the divine law, to obtain information whether he should
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be overcome by, or victorious over, their hosts. In this perplexity, he desired his servants to find him a woman who had a familiar spirit: and he resorted to one who dwelt at Endor. While she, according to her custom of deceiving, attempted to impose upon him, a vision miraculously appeared, and gave a true statement of the events that were soon to happen. But the arts of the woman who had a familiar spirit had no more influence to procure this vision, although it appeared when she was engaged in practising her tricks, than the drunkenness and impiety of an infatuated profligate had to produce "the part of the hand that wrote Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin."

To this way of accounting for the facts in the history, it may be objected,

jected, that it is very unlikely God would give Saul an answer, when he sought it by iniquitous means, and the more so, as "the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets;" but it was equally unlike that the drunkenness of Belshazzar should procure him a warning of his fate. The information they received inflicted upon them severe punishment, but contributed nothing to their welfare.

And it does not appear that Saul possessed any means from which he could reasonably expect to receive that information he desired. God did sometimes reveal to men his purposes in dreams. "If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him

“ him in a dream.”³³ No man was certain of enjoying, at his pleasure, such manifestations : and Saul was not of such a character that, by him, they could reasonably be expected. Urim he could not consult. Without entering into any disquisition about the manner in which responses were obtained from the Urim and Thummim, it may be remarked, that there is every ground to believe that they were placed only in the breastplate of one Ephod, and that the Ephod containing them was the one Abiathar carried with him, when, after the slaughter of the priests in Nob, he fled to David. We are told that “ when Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, fled to David, to Keilah, he came down with an Ephod in his hand.”

³³ Num. xii. 6.

“hand.”³⁴ As an Ephod was worn by any priest, and, in some cases, even by those who were not priests, unless there had been something peculiar about that one brought by Abiathar, it had been unworthy of the historian’s notice. This renders it reasonable to suppose, that the Ephod he brought in his hand, when he fled, was the one containing in its breastplate the Urim and Thummim. And this supposition is confirmed by the fact, that, by means of this Ephod, David consulted the Lord, and obtained answers. “And David knew
 “that Saul secretly practised mis-
 “chief against him; and he said to
 “Abiathar the priest, Bring hither
 “the Ephod. Then said David, O
 “Lord God of Israel, thy servant
 “hath certainly heard that Saul
 “seeketh

³⁴ 1 Sam. xxiii. 6.

“ seeketh to come to Keilah, to de-
 “ stroy the city for my sake. Will
 “ the men of Keilah deliver me up
 “ into his hand? Will Saul come
 “ down, as thy servant hath heard?
 “ O Lord God of Israel, I beseech
 “ thee, tell thy servant. And the
 “ Lord said, He will come down.
 “ Then said David, Will the men of
 “ Keilah deliver me and my men in-
 “ to the hand of Saul? And the
 “ Lord said, They will deliver thee
 “ up.”³⁵ When David and his men
 returned from the army of the Philis-
 tines, they found that Ziklag “ was
 “ burnt with fire; and their wives,
 “ and their sons, and their daughters,
 “ were taken captives. And David
 “ said to Abiathar the priest, Ahi-
 “ melech’s son, I pray thee, bring
 “ me hither the Ephod. And Abi-
 “ athar

³⁵ 1 Sam. xxiii. 9, 10, 11, 12.

"athar brought thither the Ephod to
 "David. And David enquired of
 "the Lord, saying, Shall I pursue
 "after this troop? Shall I overtake
 "them? And he answered him, Pur-
 "sue, for thou shalt surely overtake
 "them, and without fail recover
 "all."³⁶ From this it is sufficiently
 apparent that Saul could not consult
 the Lord by means of Urim, for the
 Ephod, in the breast-plate of which
 it was inserted, was in the possession
 of Abiathar, who had fled to David's
 camp.

Neither does it appear that there
 was any prophet, by whom Saul could
 expect to be informed concerning
 these events which filled him with
 such anxiety. "Samuel was dead,
 "and all Israel had lamented him,
 "and buried him in Ramah."³⁷ Saul
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³⁶ 1 Sam. xxx. 3. 7, 8. ³⁷ 1 Sam. xxviii. 3.

had no means left of enquiring of the Lord unless by dreams, a way in which he had no right to look for an answer. It must be confessed very extraordinary, that, when consulting one who had a familiar spirit, the Lord should, by a miracle, reveal his fate: but not more extraordinary, than that a similar discovery should be made to Belshazzar in the midst of his impiety and drunkenness.³⁸

Some, however, may suppose that no miracle was wrought: that nothing

³⁸ " Yet he (Saul) takes pains to search out
 " and apply himself to a woman reputed to
 " have a familiar spirit; probably a *cheat*, like
 " the rest of the diviners; for when, instead of
 " the woman's practising her delusive arts,
 " God thought fit, in reproof of Saul's wicked-
 " ness, to cause in reality a likeness of Samuel
 " to appear, the text tells us, that the woman

thing extraordinary was heard or seen ; and that the whole of the facts narrated by the historian, may be accounted for as illusions of the imagination. That this is the true way of obviating the difficulties of this passage, or even the most probable, is not asserted, yet it wants not verisimilitude. What is said of the woman seeing Samuel may appear irreconcilable with this supposition. That she pretended to see him is true, but

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“ herself was affrighted at the unexpected appearance, and cried out with a loud voice in great surprise when she saw Samuel, which seems to be a plain evidence that her art was a CHEAT ; and that the reality, unexpected to her, was God’s own extraordinary interposition. And this takes away the whole foundation of all those vain questions, *Whether the devil had power to disturb Samuel or not, and how he could foretell such future events, and the like.*”

Dr. Sam. Clarke’s Serm. on 1 Sam. xv. 23.

her word is entitled to no credit. She might be imposed upon by her fright, or she might wish to deceive the king. The words of the historian, "When the woman saw Sa-
 "muel,"³⁹ strongly favour the supposition, that a spectre was seen by her; but that they absolutely prove it, may be doubted. They may refer not to the fact itself, but to the representation of it given by the woman, and received by Saul. It does not appear that the servants of Saul either saw, or heard, any thing extraordinary. It is not expressly said, that Saul saw the apparition, although the manner of narration rather implies it: but, from the state of his mind at that time, Saul might, very likely, have been the dupe of a disordered fancy. If, in proof that the woman-
 saw

³⁹ 1 Sam. xxviii. 12.

saw a spectre, it be urged, that, from it, she learned that the person consulting her was Saul, it may be replied, that her discovery of the king is no sure evidence that her knowledge was acquired by any information received from an apparition. All the facts may be accounted for, without admitting that she saw any vision. She can hardly be suspected to have been a stranger to the danger of Israel, and the anxiety of its Monarch. That Saul was to perish by an untimely death, and that his dynasty was to end with himself, appear, from many incidents in his history, to have been suspected by himself, and pretty generally looked for by others. He was, at that time, opposed to a powerful army of the Philistines. These facts, combined with his desire of seeing Samuel,

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might,

might, from the natural connexion of ideas, dart the suspicion into the woman's mind, that the stranger who consulted her, behoved to be Saul. Impressions of this nature, very sudden, and in circumstances which render them much harder to be accounted for, are not unprecedented, nor even unusual. Terror, because of the penalty to which she knew herself subjected, would make her cry out, upon the slightest supposition that her guest was Saul, "Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul."

The description the woman gave of Samuel cannot be considered as a proof that she saw him. The venerable figure of the aged prophet must have been generally known. If she was deceived by the illusions of her fancy, that semblance familiar to her
 imagina-

imagination would present itself; or, if she meant to impose upon Saul, she would ascribe such an appearance to Samuel, as might persuade the king that she had *brought him up*.

If it be maintained, that it could be no illusion of the fancy that deceived Saul, for he received a prediction that was strictly verified, it may be remarked, that it was a prediction which accorded perfectly with the suggestions of his fears. And it is well known, that, in particular states of mind, men are liable to mistake strong mental impressions, for information they suppose to be given them by some other person. Instances of this in dreaming, or in delirium, are very common; and they may, it is natural to suppose, be produced by terror, or any passion of extraordinary violence. The controul of the
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understanding is suspended, but the fancy continues in operation, and its creations are mistaken for facts. In some cases, all attempts others can make to convince them of the fallacy are wholly ineffectual. Some timorous and superstitious persons believe, and resolutely maintain, that they have seen spectres, and have entered into conversation with them. Such visions are never seen but at night, when fancy, aided by darkness, predominates, and when terror hath suspended that government reason ought to maintain over the faculties. Their assertions are not always designed falsehoods, for sometimes they are fully persuaded of their truth : and it can scarcely be declared impossible for Saul to have mistaken the suggestions of his own terror, for responses given by Samuel.

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Without all dispute, he was in the fittest frame of mind imaginable for falling into such a mistake. The answer he received, for aught that appears in the history, was heard only by himself. As it accorded so well with his own apprehensions, it possibly might be dictated by his fears. That it proved correct can create no surprise, for, however ungovernable, his terror was not causeless.

It is in vain to urge, in proof that a miracle was performed by the woman who had a familiar spirit, that the historian mentions the raising of Samuel as a fact; that in his account there is not the slightest insinuation of trick or delusion. His province was to record the belief entertained by men respecting the events he mentions, not to philosophize concerning their nature, or their causes. That
Saul

Saul believed the woman raised Samuel, and that the prophet gave the response recorded in the history, is not to be doubted; but whether his conviction accorded with the fact, or was produced by means of a deception, or of a mental illusion, is a question about which the historian is wholly silent.

That his account is no proof that Samuel was raised, may be considered as admitted by numerous expositors. According to them, it was not Samuel, but Satan, assuming his likeness, who appeared. If this, perhaps the most common way of explaining the passage, be not a contradiction of the historian, it cannot surely be asserted, that the testimony of scripture is disregarded by one who might suspect the vision to have been the result of a trick, by one habituated to

to deceive, or of an illusion of the fancy, in one whom terror had rendered nearly frantic.

If either of the methods specified above, of accounting for the facts narrated by the historian, be deemed satisfactory, it will afford no support to the vulgar notion entertained of Witchcraft: or, if both be rejected, it will be found, whatever rational theory be adopted for the explanation of this passage of holy writ, that it can give no aid to the opinion, that by Satanic influence a miracle may be wrought, or information obtained. This woman at Endor is designated by an appellation which shews her to have been one of these wretched impostors who pretended to intercourse with demons, and with the dead, and whose pretences were supported by fraud, and admitted
by

by credulous simplicity. Such ignorant and shameless deceivers ever abound in rude ages, and obtain credit: but, as the shades of night are chased by the light of the morning, the prevalence of information and knowledge in the community ruins their trade.

SECT.

SECT. VII.

THE PRETENCES OF THE JEWISH EXOR-
CISTS EXAMINED.

By the miracles which our Lord performed, he proved that he was sent from God. "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me."⁴⁰ Of these miraculous displays of power, by which he substantiated his claims to the Messiahship, the casting of impure spirits out of those whom they possessed, was one. Unable to deny the reality of his miracles, his adversaries wished to represent them as effected by Sa-

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"tanic

⁴⁰ John, v. 36.

tanic influence. "The Pharisees
 "said, This fellow doth not cast out
 "devils, but by Beelzebub, the
 "prince of the devils." The man-
 ner in which our Lord refuted this
 calumny is very remarkable, and,
 from its relation to the subject un-
 der discussion, meriting attention.
 "And Jesus knew their thoughts,
 "and said unto them, Every king-
 "dom divided against itself is brought
 "to desolation; and every city or
 "house divided against itself shall
 "not stand. And if Satan cast out
 "Satan, he is divided against himself,
 "how shall then his kingdom stand?
 "And if I by Beelzebub cast out
 "devils, by whom do your children
 "cast them out? therefore they shall
 "be your judges."⁴¹

The general, and likely the just,
 opinion

⁴¹ Mat. xii. 25, 26, 27.

opinion concerning this passage is that our Lord refers to the Exorcists among the Jews, who pretended to the power of ejecting unclean spirits from those whom they possessed. From our Lord's answer, it would seem, he admitted that these pretences were justified by facts, and allowed that the Exorcists did cast out devils. If this were actually the case, it would give much probability to the notions entertained of Witchcraft. If men could obtain such controul over fallen spirits, as to eject them from those whom they possessed, the possibility, at least, of such a compact with Satan as that supposed in the crime of Witchcraft, might, without scruple, be admitted. If they could drive out spirits from those whom he possessed, it would be very credible that they might

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cause

cause them also assume the likeness of the dead, and reveal the secrets of futurity. It would be very supposable, that by their ministry, they might perform works above human power. The admission also, that any, with the exception of those whom he endued with the power of working miracles, can dispossess unclean spirits, would overturn that proof of his Messiahship given by our Lord, when "he cast out the spirits with his word." It would not have been true of him, at least when he performed this miracle, that "he did the works which none other man did."⁴²

Neither is the performance of miracles by our Lord's disciples parallel with the ejection of spirits by the Jewish Exorcists. The disciples attributed

⁴² John, xv. 24.

tributed not their success to their own power. They ever asserted that the miracles they performed were owing to the energies of their Lord, and that they were endued with the capacity of working these only to furnish a sufficient proof of the truths they taught, and to shew that they were the accredited messengers of the Most High. When the people crowded, in Solomon's porch, round the Apostles, and the lame man whom they had healed, Peter said "unto the people, Ye men of Israel, "why marvel ye at this? or why "look ye so earnestly on us, as "though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, "and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his son Jesus; "whom ye delivered up, and denied

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" him

“ him in the presence of Pilate, when
 “ he was determined to let him go.
 “ But ye denied the Holy One, and
 “ the Just, and desired a murderer
 “ to be granted unto you ; and killed
 “ the Prince of Life, whom God
 “ hath raised from the dead ; where-
 “ of we are witnesses. And his name,
 “ through faith in his name, hath
 “ made this man strong, whom ye see
 “ and know ; yea, the faith which is
 “ by him, hath given him this perfect
 “ soundness in the presence of you
 “ all.”⁴³ But the Exorcists pretend-
 ed, that the pronouncing of certain
 words, accompanied by particular ce-
 remonies, was the cause of their suc-
 cess. If their pretensions were well
 founded, instead of being treated as
 a vulgar prejudice, Witchcraft would
 be entitled to be considered as by no
 means

⁴³ Acts, iii. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

means improbable. Enquiry shall, therefore, be made, whether the pretences of the Jewish Exorcists were justified by facts, or whether they owed their credit to "all deceivableness of unrighteousness."

What our Lord says concerning the miracles supposed to have been effected by them, can neither be accounted an evidence of their genuineness, nor that they were spurious. All that his words can prove is that some Jews pretended to eject spirits from those they possessed, and that, by their countrymen, their pretensions were credited: he states not his own judgment respecting the matter. The language he used would have been the same, whether he deemed the pretensions of the Jewish Exorcists justified by facts, or knew them to be impositions. His object
was

was not to enter into a discussion about the genuineness of the cures effected by the Exorcists, but, from the manner in which they treated them, compared with their behaviour to him, to evince the envy of the Pharisees, and refute their calumnies. Whether it were so or not, the Pharisees admitted, that "their children cast out devils;" but, unable to deny our Lord's miracles, they ascribed them to Satanic influence. And, to expose their malice, he asked, why they ascribed his miracles to such a cause, when they were not accustomed in this manner to account for the success of others.

The most effectual method of defeating his adversaries was adopted by our Lord. Had he urged, that authority over impure spirits was a proof that he was sent from God, the
Pharisees

Pharisees could have replied, that the same authority was possessed by the Exorcists. And, to rectify their mistake, or misrepresentation, had he attempted to prove, that the pretences of the Exorcists were impositions, and that the credit they obtained was a delusion, his hearers were destitute of the powers necessary to qualify them for listening unto, or comprehending his arguments. Of this any one may be satisfied, who adverts to the credit a man would obtain, with the vulgar, who endeavoured to instruct them about the globular form of the earth, about its diurnal and annual motions, and about the sun, while it revolved round him, continuing stationary. The ignorance of his auditors would render inefficient the cogency of his proofs. Our Lord knew the heart
of

of man, and what arguments were suited to the attainments of his hearers. He could judge his enemies "out of their own mouth;" and, without stating any judgment, whether their belief was justified by facts, or wholly void of foundation, from what they admitted respecting the Jewish Exorcists, compared with their accusations against him, he shewed their malignity, and refuted their charges.

Whether the Jewish Exorcists cast out devils, or not, is a question then about which our Lord says nothing. All that his words imply is that the Pharisees admitted their success. It was altogether immaterial, in the dispute betwixt him and his accusers, whether their admission coincided, or discorded with the truth; upon either supposition, it was adequate to refute
their

their calumnies ; and for this purpose it was employed by our Lord.

But, although our Lord says nothing about the nature of those feats said to have been performed by the Jewish Exorcists, abundance of evidence is not wanting to prove them tricks and impositions. Pretences of a similar nature are, when society is in a rude state, uniformly made, and always credited. Were it possible to doubt whether the Exorcists performed real miracles, or only deceived the credulous, notwithstanding that the air of his narration indicates his full belief of their powers, the account given by the Jewish historian of the manner of their operation, would remove all uncertainty. Describing the wisdom and attainments of Solomon, he says, " He did not only know and understand, "
" (by

“ (by a gift from above,) but like-
 “ wise improve his knowledge and
 “ understanding of these things, for
 “ the help and benefit of mankind,
 “ even to the confusion of the devils
 “ themselves ; for he composed
 “ charms and incantations, for cure
 “ of diseases, and left behind him
 “ forms of conjuration, in writing,
 “ so effectual against evil spirits, that
 “ they fly before them, without ever
 “ daring to return ; which way of
 “ remedy is much in request with
 “ our people to this day. ‘ I saw
 “ one Eleazar, a countryman of
 “ mine, dispossessing of people in
 “ the presence of Vespasian, and his
 “ sons, officers, and soldiers : and his
 “ way was thus ; he applied a ring
 “ to the nostrils of the person pos-
 “ sessed, with a piece of root conveyed
 “ under the seal of it, being a secret
 “ of

“ of Solomon’s. The demoniac did
 “ but smell to it, and the devil was
 “ drawn out by the nose. The spi-
 “ rit threw the man down, but Ele-
 “ azar adjured it never to trouble
 “ him any more; making frequent
 “ mention of Solomon’s name in the
 “ time of the operation, and reciting
 “ charms and incantations of his in-
 “ vention. Eleazar, after this, was
 “ willing to shew the people a master-
 “ piece: so he set a cup or basin of
 “ water, at a little distance from the
 “ man that was possessed, and ad-
 “ jured the devil to overturn this
 “ basin at his leaving the man, as a
 “ token to the company that he had
 “ quitted him. This being done, no-
 “ body doubted of the admirable
 “ knowledge and wisdom of Solo-
 “ mon.”⁴⁴ No proofs of deceit can
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⁴⁴ Josephus’ Jew. Ant. Book viii.

shake their faith who are not convinced, by this account, that the ejection of spirits by the Exorcists was a trick. In accomplishing such a feat, no juggler, of ordinary capacity, could fail of success.

And the sacred pages furnish sufficient proofs, that the wonders these Exorcists pretended to perform were false and delusive. That they were so, the conduct of some of them, when they saw true miracles effected, may be considered as equivalent to an admission.

The historian who records the Acts of the Apostles, informs us, that
 “ God wrought special miracles by
 “ the hands of Paul : so that from his
 “ body was brought unto the sick
 “ handkerchiefs or aprons, and the
 “ diseases departed from them, and
 “ the evil spirits went out of
 “ them.”

them.”⁴⁵ The Exorcists witnessed his success. They pretended to effect similar miracles; and, had they been equally successful, they would have been under no inducement to relinquish their usual manner of procedure, and imitate that of the Apostle. The copying of his example was a public acknowledgment of his superior power, which they cannot be supposed to have given, without the greatest reluctance. Their aversion to this acknowledgment would be increased by their religious prejudices. A furious zeal for a religion, whose precepts they neither obey nor understand, frequently distinguishes men of the most worthless characters: and, owing to the opposition falsely supposed to exist betwixt the doctrines of Moses and

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those

⁴⁵ Acts, xix. 11, 12.

those of Paul, Jews of every description, with the exception of those who obeyed the gospel, would be shocked by the idea of substituting the name of Jesus in the place of that of the God of Israel. With such powerful causes to prevent them from copying his manner, the Jewish Exorcists cannot be supposed to have adopted it from any reason, but a conviction that he succeeded where they failed, and performed genuine miracles, while they merely deceived the unwary. Such a persuasion can alone account for their using the name of Jesus. Yet this name they did employ, and "received that recompense which was meet." "Then certain of the vagabond Jews, Exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits, the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you,

" you, by Jesus, whom Paul preach-
 " eth. And there were seven sons
 " of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of
 " the priests, which did so. And the
 " evil spirit answered and said, Jesus
 " I know, and Paul I know, but who
 " are ye? And the man in whom the
 " evil spirit was leapt on them, and
 " overcame them, so that they fled
 " out of the house naked and wound-
 " ed." ⁴⁶

There is then the justest reason to
 conclude, that the pretences of the
 Exorcists were false, and the feats
 they were said to perform can afford
 no support to the notion, that such a
 compact with Satan, as is supposed
 in the crime of Witchcraft, is pos-
 sible.

Yet, although these Exorcists were
 impostors, and their pretences to the

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power.

⁴⁶ Acts, xix. 13, 14, 15, 16.

power of ejecting spirits a lie, it is not argued that they failed, in every case, to relieve the distressed. Those who sought their aid frequently laboured under mental derangement, or hypochondriacal complaints. And from the relation their distempers bore to the imagination, if those who professed to cure them could, by any means, convince the diseased that their powers were adequate to the purpose in view, there is no question but, in many instances, this persuasion might succeed in removing their maladies. Their incantations and their rites were totally inefficient, but the conviction of their success, felt by the patient, might produce a cure. But this can, with no propriety, be ascribed to the power of the Exorcists. A cup of cold water, accompanied by the same persuasion,
on

on the mind of the patient, would have been equally effectual. From this it will not be argued, that a cup of cold water is efficacious enough to eject evil spirits from those whom they possess. The success of the Exorcist, however, in some instances, no matter to what it was owing, would support their credit, under many failures, especially with the weak and uninstructed. Disregarding numerous failures, such instances would be triumphantly quoted to silence, and confound those who disbelieved their pretences.

Men have a strong propensity to credit the marvellous. And it frequently happens, that pretences are the more readily believed, especially by the vulgar, that they are in their nature impossible. Soon after the discovery of America, because they
gave

gave credit to a tradition prevailing among the natives of Puerto Rico, that in the isle of Bimini, one of the Lucayos, there was a fountain of such wonderful virtue as to renew youth, and recal the vigour of every person who bathed in the salutary waters, a Spanish chief and his followers, in hopes of finding this grand restorative, ranged through the islands, searching, with fruitless solicitude and labour, for the fountain, which was the chief object of their expedition.⁴⁷

47 Rob. Amer. Book iii. Chap. 8.

SECT.

SECT. VIII.

THE HISTORY OF SIMON THE SORCERER
EXAMINED.

THE account given, in the Acts of the Apostles, of one Simon, who used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, to the reader of the English scriptures, may appear to set the question respecting the existence of Witchcraft entirely at rest. What is said of him then will merit particular attention.

The word translated USED SORCERY, signifies PRACTISED MAGIC; and that it may be rightly apprehended what is to be understood by practising magic, it is to be remarked, that the magians were a sect of philosophers,
very

very famous in the east. To this sect of learned men those strangers belonged, who, because when in their own country, they saw an unusual star, came from the east to Jerusalem, enquiring for the birth-place of the King of the Jews. For the word rendered by our translators WISE MEN literally signifies MAGIANS.⁴⁸ So famous was this race of philosophers, that a learned man and a magian became equivalent terms.⁴⁹ As might have been expected, the consequence of the fame they justly obtained, was, that a multitude of pretenders to science, and empirics, who deceived the vulgar by their cheats, professed to belong to this class of philosophers. This brought discredit upon their name, and the term

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⁴⁸ Mat. ii. 1.

⁴⁹ Vide Parkhurst's G. Lex. voc. ΜΑΓΟΣ.

magian was frequently taken in an unfavourable acception.

In the bad sense in which it was understood, a *magian* may be defined, one who pretended to supernatural powers, and who supported his credit by an acquaintance with some facts in natural philosophy, not generally known, and by juggling tricks. From what the sacred historian says of him then, Simon may be viewed as one who pretended to supernatural power, and who gained credit, because, by an acquaintance with the secret powers of nature, he could produce effects that astonished the illiterate; or because, by his dexterity as a juggler, he imposed upon their simplicity. This is the utmost that can be deduced from what Luke says concerning him, and which our translators have rendered USED SORCERY.

And

And in all this there appears no such compact with Satan as is understood to take place in Witchcraft.

But of this man it is said, that he "bewitched the people of Samaria." It will be allowed, by every one capable of judging of the matter, that our translators could hardly have chosen a more unhappy word than *bewitched* for rendering the original term. Like most words, *bewitched* may be understood in a figurative sense. We say of one, whose behaviour is remarkably agreeable, that he is a *bewitching* companion; or of one, the charms of whose conversation can persuade almost to any thing, that his manner is truly *bewitching*. But there is no reason to think, that, by our translators, the term *bewitched*, in this passage, was used in any such figurative sense;
nor

nor, by the reader, is it thus understood. And, were it to be admitted, such an apology is not satisfactory. There is no sufficient reason for using a term, which can convey any thing like the meaning of the original, only when understood figuratively, and which, consequently, is very apt to mislead, when the English language afforded abundance of words, coinciding exactly with that one employed by the sacred writer.

The real cause of their using the term bewitched, seems to be, that the belief of Witchcraft was prevalent in their age, and its existence credited by themselves. Eminent as they were for erudition, they cannot be supposed to have been wholly uninfected with reigning prejudices. The intolerant pedant, under whose auspices their translation was made,

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was not more distinguished for his love of Bishops, than for his hatred of Witches. And to have hesitated in making Witches appear very prominent in scripture, might have exposed to the royal displeasure. In that bigotted age, to have questioned the existence of Witchcraft would have been construed into a disbelief of the Deity.

To the temper of the times, therefore, and to their own prejudices, we are to refer that extraordinary countenance given, in their translation, to the notion of Witchcraft, wholly unauthorised by the original scriptures. For if the original word, in the passage now under consideration, should be translated bewitched, when referring to Simon, it ought to be rendered in the same manner, when applied to Philip. For when it is
said

said, that " Simon himself believed
 " also ; and when he was baptized,
 " he continued with Philip, and won-
 " dered, beholding the miracles and
 " signs which were done," the word
 rendered wondered is a part of the
 very verb, which, when applied to
 Simon, is translated bewitched. If
 it was true then of Simon, that he
 " bewitched the people of Samaria,"
 it was no less true of Philip that he
 bewitched Simon. But the term
 rendered bewitched merely signifies
 GREATLY ASTONISHED.⁵⁰ And if the

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pas-

⁵⁰ Those who are unacquainted with the ori-
 ginal language of scripture have no just cause
 to suspect that the translation is now altered, in
 this manner, to serve a purpose. If desirous
 only of finding the truth, one can have no si-
 nister object in view, requiring the aid of dis-
 honest means : and were he even altogether
 destitute of integrity, it cannot be supposed

passage be translated accordingly, the history of Simon will give no support to the notion of Witchcraft. Then it will read in the following manner: " There was a certain man, " called Simon, who before time in " the same city practised magic, and " greatly astonished the people of " Samaria,

that, from an attachment to theory, he would commit a fraud, when detection and exposure were inevitable.

That word, the import of which is now the subject of enquiry, is not of rare occurrence in the sacred volume, nor is there difficulty in ascertaining its meaning. From a variety of passages, perfectly adapted for the purpose, one is selected, to evince the fairness of the version now offered. Luke, in his history of our Lord's life, informs us, that his parents, missing him as they returned from the feast of the passover, " turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that " after three days they found him in the tem-

" Samaria, giving out that himself
 " was some great one. To whom
 " they all gave heed, from the least
 " to the greatest, saying, this man
 " is the great power of God. And
 " to him they had regard, because
 " that of long time he had greatly
 " astonished them, by his magical
 " feats." From the genuine account
 K 3 then

" ple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both
 " hearing them, and asking them questions.
 " And all that heard him were astonished at
 " his understanding and answers. And when
 " they saw him, they were amazed." Luke ii.
 45, 46, 47, 48. Here the term rendered *were*
astonished belongs to the verb which, in Acts,
 when referring to Simon, is enenglished be-
 witched. Were the Evangelist's account of our
 Lord to be thus translated, it would seem ex-
 tremely awkward. In our ears, it would sound
 worse than oddly to say, " all that heard him
 " *were bewitched at his understanding and an-*
 " *swers.*"

then given by the historian, it appears, that all that Simon did might, without any such Satanic aid as that supposed in Witchcraft, have been accomplished, by any bold, unprincipled pretender, assisted by considerable cunning and dexterity. Such a man was Simon, and to such causes he was indebted for his fame.

SECT.

SECT. IX.

THE HISTORY OF THE DAMSEL AT PHILIPPI EXAMINED.

It is recorded by Luke, that when Paul was in the city of Philippi, “ it
“ came to pass, as we went to prayer,
“ a certain damsel, possessed with a
“ spirit of divination, met us, which
“ brought her masters much gain by
“ soothsaying. The same followed
“ Paul and us, and cried, saying,
“ These men are the servants of the
“ Most High God, which shew unto
“ us the way of salvation. And this
“ she did many days. But Paul,
“ being grieved, turned, and said to
“ the spirit, I command thee, in the
“ name of Jesus Christ, to come out
“ of

“ of her. And he came out the
“ same hour.””

From the near relation it bears to the subject of Witchcraft, this history is entitled to consideration.

Were we destitute of all authentic information respecting the subject, and left to conjecture what is probable, there is nothing in the doctrine of a man being possessed by fallen spirits, from which it could be concluded false, or, even, that its truth is unlikely. The notion that beings of a spiritual nature may have intercourse with the mind is perfectly consonant to the dictates of reason. And, if such intercourse take place, these spirits will suggest unto us sentiments, or stimulate our passions. If this be possible, in any degree, it may, in some instances, take place
to

5^t Acts, xvi. 16, 17, 18,

to such an extent, that men may be entirely under their government. Admitting the existence of malignant spirits, our own speculations, unaided by the light of revelation, would naturally conduct, respecting their agency, to such a conclusion. And that this conclusion accords with the truth, scripture puts beyond a question. In it numerous instances are recorded of men being possessed by demons. It is reasonable to think, that, when they possess men, these demons, by their direct operation, can only affect their minds. But the connexion betwixt the spiritual part of our constitution, and the material, is so intimate, that the body must suffer, when the mind is greatly agitated. These, accordingly, who were possessed by demons, were subjected at sometimes, to bodily distempers, and,

and, at other times, to mental derangement. We read of one, "who
 " had a dumb spirit: and whereso-
 " ever he took him, he tare him; and
 " he foamed, and gnashed with his
 " teeth, and pined away."⁵² And
 we read of "a man with an unclean
 " spirit, who had his dwelling among
 " the tombs, and no man could bind
 " him, no, not with chains. Because
 " that he had been often bound with
 " fetters and chains, and the chains
 " had been plucked asunder by him,
 " and the fetters broken in pieces:
 " neither could any man tame him.
 " And always, night and day, he was
 " in the mountains, and in the tombs,
 " crying, and cutting himself with
 " stones."⁵³

From what is stated about that
 damsel, whose history is now the
 sub-

⁵² Mark, ix. 17, 18. ⁵³ Mark. v. 2, 3, 4, 5.

subject of consideration, it appears, that the effect of Satanic influence upon her, was a derangement of her mental faculties. She had entered into no compact with Satan, and there appears no reason to believe that she maintained with him any such intercourse, as that supposed in the case of Witchcraft. His influence over her was her misery, not her choice. That she was actuated by him is plain; that she consulted him, or even knew of his existence, there is not the shadow of evidence. But it may be urged, that madness could not communicate the talent of revealing secrets, or foretelling events. Her powers of divination, however, may be accounted for, without allowing that she was in compact with Satan, or obtained her knowledge by consulting him. If

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a persuasion of the truth of her predictions tended to support the interests of the kingdom of darkness, from the influence he possessed over her imagination, in her ravings, Satan might make her utter expressions which were verified by facts.⁵⁴ Or, which is perhaps more probable, the

54 " It is easy to conceive Satan, if his preternatural agency on the mind be admitted, " to have enabled the subjects of his inspiration to reveal secrets, because deeds committed in darkness, and in the closest retirement, " are open to the inspection of a spirit. He " could farther have made them acquainted " with distant transactions, the immediate " knowledge of which it was impossible to " have obtained by any natural means. He " might have given them some notices of futurity, by informing them of such things as he " intended to do, or as were already in a certain train to be accomplished. He undoubtedly can conjecture, with greater sagacity

the credit of her predictions was maintained by their cunning, to whom her misery was a source of emolument. From her history, it appears, that she was kept by certain masters for the sake of gain; and it required no extraordinary share of that boldness and craft, usually possessed by men of such a character, so to construe the incoherent ravings of a maniac, as to gull a credulous populace into the persuasion, that they were revelations of secret facts, or predictions of futurity.

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“ than we, what will be the result in a variety of cases, from the superior powers of his mind, his longer, and more extensive experience, and his more perfect acquaintance with human nature in general, and the dispositions and circumstances of individuals. In every other respect, futurity is hidden from him as well as from us, by an impene-

Theologians have been not a little
 diffculted to account for the testi-
 mony she gave to Paul and Silas. In
 explaining the passage where this
 testimony is recorded, an elegant
 writer remarks, " The conduct of the
 " damsel, in reference to Paul and
 " his brethren, is not so easily ex-
 " plained. ' The same followed Paul
 " and us, and cried, saying, These
 " men are the servants of the Most
 " High God, which shew unto us the
 " way of salvation.' This account
 " of Paul and Silas was certainly just.
 " They were the servants of God,
 " who

" trable veil. A real prophecy, or the predic-
 " tion of an event, which shall be produced
 " by causes not yet in existence, or depends
 " upon the free agency of men, we may safely
 " pronounce him as incapable of delivering as
 " the most short-sighted of mortals." Dick's
 Lec. on Acts, Lec. xvii.

“ who had come to Macedonia, to de-
 “ clare to the inhabitants of that
 “ country the way of salvation from
 “ sin and death. But why did the
 “ unclean spirit bear so honourable
 “ testimony to men, in whose success
 “ his destruction was involved? Shall
 “ we say, that he was compelled, by
 “ the superior power of Jesus Christ,
 “ to publish, to his own confusion,
 “ what he would have willingly sup-
 “ pressed? or were the words spoken
 “ in derision of their character and
 “ pretensions? Was it the design of
 “ the cunning spirit to conciliate
 “ their favour by flattering compli-
 “ ments? or did he hope, by the
 “ promptitude with which he com-
 “ mended them, to make the Phi-
 “ lippians believe that he and they
 “ were acting in concert?”⁵⁵ But, if
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⁵⁵ Dick's Lec. on Acts, Lec. xvii.

she laboured under mental derangement, the conduct of the damsel in following Paul and his companions, "saying, These are the servants of the Most High God, which shew unto us the way of salvation," need excite no very great surprize. An usual accompaniment of insanity is to be greatly affected by any uncommon event, and to repeat, incessantly, any strange remark the patient may have heard from others, or which may, by any means, have been suggested to his own imagination. The advent of Paul and his brethren, there is every reason to believe, had produced a great sensation in Philippi; and their intention, in visiting that city, had become the subject of general conversation, of conjecture, and of wonder. The impression these things would naturally make upon

upon a frenzied understanding may sufficiently account for the damsel following the Apostles, and testifying that they were the servants of the Most High God.

It is not denied, that Providence meant to render her behaviour subservient to important purposes. But of what noticeable occurrence; almost, may not the same be asserted? All that is meant is, that there is no reason to think that she was moved by Satan to declare in favour of the Apostles; or that she acted in any other manner than, in such circumstances, might have been expected of one whose mental faculties were deranged.

From her history, there appears very sufficient evidence that Satan had such an influence over her as deprived her of her understanding, or,

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if

if her disease preceded his possession of her, taking advantage of her mental imbecility, that he made her utter such expressions, as were believed by the multitude to be oracular : but there is not the shadow of a proof that she was in compact with him ; that she knew aught concerning such wickedness, or even of the very existence of that malignant spirit, by whose influence her mind was distracted.

Her history then, and the predictions she uttered, can give no aid to the vulgar notions about Witchcraft.

SECT.

SECT. X.

**THAT WITCHCRAFT, PAUL RANKS AMONG
THE WORKS OF THE FLESH, EXAMINED.**

WRITING to the Church of Galatia, the Apostle of the Gentiles gives a catalogue of "the works of the flesh." Among these, Witchcraft is mentioned. That, by the generality of readers, the crime he specifies by this designation is understood to be a compact with Satan, in virtue of which, works exceeding human power are performed, is not to be questioned. And this accords with the import assigned to it by some of the most respectable expositors of scripture. The comment upon it in Poole's Annotations is, "The product of compacts
" with the devil; by virtue of which
" the

“ the persons so contracting are as-
 “ sisted, by the power of evil spirits,
 “ to produce effects, besides the ordi-
 “ nary course and order of nature,
 “ and for the most part mischievous
 “ to others.”⁵⁶ If this exposition be
 just, the theory denying that Witch-
 craft is, according to this acceptation
 of the term, mentioned in scripture,
 must be renounced. The import of
 the term Witchcraft in this place,
 therefore, is deserving of examination.

The original word translated by it
 literally signifies PHARMACY. In this
 passage it is susceptible of one of two
 very different meanings. It may
 mean the employment of deleterious
 drugs for mischievous purposes. As
 when they are administered with the
 design of breaking the health, by their
 poisonous qualities, or of destroying
 life.

⁵⁶ Poole's Annot. Gal. v. 20.

life. Or it may mean the employment of drugs for the purpose of enchantment or sorcery.

If the first of these meanings be ascribed to it, the crime spoken of by the Apostle, has no connexion with Witchcraft, and cannot affect the theory which denies that it is mentioned in scripture. There would seem, however, to be good reason for preferring the last of the two meanings, and to understand the Apostle as referring to the employment of drugs for the purpose of enchantment and sorcery. "I am well aware," says Parkhurst, "that some learned men would rather interpret the word by *poisoning*, which it sometimes signifies in the Greek writers: but since in the LXX. this noun, and its relatives, always answer to some Hebrew word, which denotes

“ notes some kind of their *magical*
 “ or *conjuring tricks*, and since it is
 “ too notorious to be insisted on, that
 “ such infernal practices have always
 “ prevailed, and do still prevail, in
 “ idolatrous countries, I prefer the
 “ other sense of incantation.”⁵⁷

Admitting the crime mentioned by the Apostle then to be enchantment or sorcery, it will still remain to be enquired, whether scripture gives any support to the notion that Witchcraft, in the sense of a compact with Satan, in virtue of which preternatural powers are obtained, ever existed.

The Apostle was writing to those who had lately been converted from heathenism, who would, of consequence, be acquainted with the usages of the Gentiles, and in danger of indulging in their crimes. By the term
 Witch-

⁵⁷ Parkhurst's G. Lex.

Witchcraft he may then be supposed to refer to some criminal or superstitious practice known to the Galatians. And, from the history of the heathen, it may be easily determined what was the precise crime he meant to specify. A notion very prevalent, at least among the vulgar, was that the employment of certain substances, accompanied with the rites their superstition prescribed, would be successful in inspiring those whom they wished to affect, with the sentiments they desired, or in punishing them if they proved refractory. This belief, and the practices to which it gave rise, is frequently mentioned by the classical writers. Horace represents Canidia as ordering, for the purpose of enchantment, “ wild fig trees torn
 “ from sepulchres, funereal cypresses,
 “ eggs besmeared with the blood of a
 “ loath-

"loathsome toad, the wing of the
 "nocturnal screech-owl, and herbs
 "sent by Iolcos and Iberia, fruitful
 "in poisons, and bones snatched from
 "the mouth of a hungry dog, to be
 "burned in Colchian flames."⁵⁸ Such
 is the description given by this hu-
 morous writer, of the Witchcraft of
 the heathen. They practised super-
 stitious and detestable rites. By these
 they attempted the most villainous
 projects. But sure they knew nothing
 of a compact with evil spirits. Their
 sorceries might qualify them for gul-
 ling the credulous, but, besides this,
 they conferred no power. By means
 of them they could neither "do good
 "nor do evil."

Theocritus represents Simætha fran-
 tic with love for one Myndius Del-
 phis, as employing, aided by her ser-
 vant

⁵⁸ Hor. Ephod. Ode 5.

vant Thestylis, powerful incantations
 and sorceries, to bring him to her.
 After invoking Luna and Hecate, she
 proceeds in this manner. Address-
 sing herself to her servant, she says,
 " Sprinkle the salt, and say, ' The
 " bones of Delphis I sprinkle.' Iynx
 " drag thou that man to my house.
 " Delphis torments me : but for Del-
 " phis I burn this laurel. And as it
 " cracks, greatly inflamed, and sud-
 " denly consumes, so that we see not
 " even its ashes, thus, likewise, let
 " the flesh of Delphis consume in
 " flame. Iynx, drag thou that man
 " to my house. As I melt this wax,
 " so, by divine aid, shall Myndius
 " Delphis immediately melt in love.
 " As this brasen circle revolves, by
 " the help of Venus, so shall he roll
 " at our gates." 59

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59 Theo. Idy. ii.

Were it necessary, abundance of similar quotations from the heathen writers might be made ; but these are sufficient to shew, that by some of the low and worthless among them, particular substances, accompanied by certain rites and enchantments, were used for the purpose of sorcery. In Christian countries, in dark and profligate ages, this abomination of the heathen hath sometimes been imitated. That the Apostle refers to a practice of this nature, when he represents Witchcraft as one of " the works of the flesh," there appears no reason to question. Of this crime the term he employs is sufficiently descriptive, but it suits no other species of wickedness known to exist. The Galatians, from their former habits, and the state of society in which they lived, must have been familiar with it ;

it; and against it they needed to be warned. It might, with justice, be described as one of "the works of the flesh," for its nature was such, that of it no one could have been supposed guilty in whom the fear of God ruled. A regard for such a practice, however irrational, was fitted to give violence to the worst passions of the depraved heart. Its tendency was to turn men from the service of the true God, to the commission of a crime of which the absurdity was exceeded only by its atrocity. Had the Galatians well understood true religion, or enjoyed those means of information with which latter ages are favoured, to have warned them against it would have been unnecessary; yet, owing to their circumstances, they might be tempted to commit this crime, and the Apostle, to secure their innocence, ranks it, deservedly,

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servedly, among "the works of the
"flesh."

Without denying the criminality of such a practice, or its ruinous influence upon men, in certain states of society, or of information, it must be plain, that it affords no support to the common belief respecting Witchcraft. In such a practice superstition appears in one of its most malignant forms, and does incalculable mischief, but no compact, in the ordinary sense of the term, is entered into with Satan ; no preternatural powers are acquired, and nothing miraculous is accomplished.

Under the name of Witchcraft, Paul speaks of an abomination well known to exist. But his words, although often referred to for the purpose, will not afford evidence that the vulgar opinion about Witchcraft accords

cords with the representations of scripture. All that they can prove is, that there was a crime, known in his age, by this name. They do not shew, that the offence, still specified by the same term, is the same. Nor could any thing but ignorance of the usages to which he refers, have made any one dream, that the language he employed justified the silly and extravagant notions, entertained in latter times, respecting Witchcraft.

If these passages of scripture that have been examined give no support to the prevailing notions concerning Witchcraft, it will be granted that there are none else which can be deemed more favourable to them. To have examined every passage in which it was mentioned, or that might have been supposed to refer to it, would
have

have been a tedious and unprofitable labour; but the consideration of no portion of Holy Writ has been shunned from the dread that its testimony would have been opposite to the theory attempted to be established. On the contrary, these passages most commonly quoted in support of the vulgar opinion about Witchcraft, or apparently most favourable to it, have been selected, and examined. That explanation of them has been given which appeared best to accord with the truth; whether it be always satisfactory, is not the question chiefly meriting attention, but whether it be sufficient to shew that they give no countenance to that notion of Witchcraft, which, although not uncommon among people in the ordinary ranks of society, may be justly accounted a delusion and a foolery.

It

It is readily granted, that, in the discussion of the subject, nothing has been advanced recommended by the charm of novelty, nor any thing discovered but what sensible men have always understood and believed.⁶⁰ It was intended only to correct the mistakes into which many unlettered Christians do fall, to prevent them from perplexing themselves by attempting to believe what is abhorrent to reason, and from exposing themselves,

⁶⁰ " Another particular of this sort is Witchcraft; that is (in the scripture sense of that word) Astrology, Fortune-telling, and all other pretences of that kind, which, if they had any reality in them, would be literally diabolical; and having NO REALITY in them, yet they are truly diabolical, as being *cheats, delusions, and impositions* upon mankind." Dr. Sam. Clarke's Sermon on John, viii. 44.

selves, and the religion they highly venerate, to the derision of profane and ignorant witlings. All the doctrines of religion are so consonant to reason, that, without intermingling with them something absurd, the acutest malignity could not represent them as ridiculous: but, in many instances, its friends, by admitting as part of its testimony what it never taught, furnish its enemies with a pretence for treating it with scorn. The detection and exposure of every mistake of this kind tends, unquestionably, to unveil the beauty of "the doctrine which is according to godliness."

THE END.



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